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Rutland in the Civil War - The Final Chapter



FOLDBYVANCESTRY.COM, TIMOTHY O'SULLIVAN



PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR

April, 1865

Left: April 9 – General Lee surrenders the Army of Northern Virginia at the McLean House (pictured) in Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia.

Right: April 14 – President Abraham Lincoln is shot at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., and dies the next day. The President sat for this portrait on the day of Lee's surrender.

About the Author

After moving to Rutland, Robert Ranftle joined the Rutland Historical Society in 2009. He is a member of the Exhibit Committee working on the multi-year Civil War commemorative project.

This is the sixth quarterly issue that he has compiled and produced at the Society, all about the Civil War. See "For Further Reading".

Introduction

For the past four years, the Rutland Historical Society has presented and discussed the Civil War, how the war affected Rutland, and how Rutland influenced the war.

In the summer of 2015, we are now past the 150 year anniversary of the end of the war. Our focus in looking back now shifts to the latter stages of the war and its aftermath.

The spring of 1865 was a tumultuous time for the entire country. April 1865 was possibly the most significant month in the history of the United States with:

- Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant
- The assassination of President Lincoln

How were these monumental events received in Rutland (in the days before television, radio, the Internet, Facebook and Twitter)?

The war had a huge effect on life in the nation. What was life in Rutland like from 1861 to (circa) 1885, and how was it that influenced by the war?

For a number of Rutland's veterans, things were left unsettled when the war ended. Old matters and differences had to be reconciled, and for others, there was more armed conflict to come. What are some of these stories?

These are the main topics of the final issue in our series, as we wrap up our commemorative project.

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Rutland in the Civil War – The Final Chapter

by Robert Ranftle

The End of the War

During the early days of 1865, many in the North focused on conditions in the South, and just how long those conditions would allow a continuation of the fighting.

The Rutland Herald at this time was devoting a fair amount of attention to conditions in the Confederacy. As reported by the Herald, the high command of the Rebels had resolved to fight on, no matter what the cost might be; even the fall of Richmond and Petersburg would not cause them to disavow that promise.

From early 1865 through that April, the end of the war was a foregone conclusion, as obvious to the leaders of the Confederacy as to anyone else. To avert that outcome, drastic proposals such as arming African Americans to fight for the Confederacy were considered, with Gen. Lee's consent.¹

Other matters of interest were the morale and disposition of rebel troops, who were deserting in large numbers, and whether the Confederacy could continue for another campaign. According to Gen. Lee, the answer was no.²

In March, in a last-ditch effort, Lee launched an attack on Union forces at Petersburg, and suffered a significant defeat at Fort Steadman.³ This was followed by other Confederate defeats, including the Battle of Five Forks, after which the decision to evacuate Petersburg and Richmond was made.

Surrender

Finally, on April 1st and 2nd, the Union broke through the Confederate lines at Petersburg, setting the stage for the rebel retreat toward Richmond and the final surrender on April 9th.

In Rutland, the occasion of Lee's surrender brought great celebration. "A furor of joyful excitement was aroused in this community by the reception of the glorious news of Lee's surrender."⁴ A meeting of the

¹ Rutland Herald, January 5, 1865, quoting the Richmond Dispatch

² Rutland Herald, March 27, 1865, quoting an editorial in the New York Tribune.

³ Rutland Herald, March 30, 1865, dispatch from Secretary Stanton.

⁴ Rutland Herald, April 13, 1865

citizens was convened to arrange a program of celebration for the afternoon and evening of that same day. Places of business were closed at 1 p.m. and the people turned out to the streets to share and celebrate the news.

Later in the afternoon, a procession was formed consisting of military units, musicians, the Fire Companies and the citizens; this procession marched through the principal streets, accompanied by bells, steam whistles and cannon fire. The procession concluded at the U. S. Court House. Patriotic music and speeches ensued.⁵

In the evening, there was a "grand illumination and torch-light procession", along with bonfires and fireworks. The citizens all came out again to share the final moments of the day of joy, so long hoped for during the previous four years of distress.

The Death of President Abraham Lincoln

Early on Saturday, April 15th, only days after the news of Lee's surrender and the day-long celebration, Rutland received the terrible news that President Lincoln had been assassinated.

A meeting was convened that afternoon to determine the actions and resolutions to be taken. Similar meetings were held in nearby towns, including Ludlow, Fair Haven, and East Wallingford.⁶

Rutland's official day of mourning was set for Wednesday, April 19th. The events of that day were captured by the Rutland Herald in an article entitled "The Last Sad Obsequies".⁷

"In Rutland, there never before occurred such a demonstration. The people all came out as with one accord, anxious to give expression to their grief and pay their tribute to the memory of the great and good man the nation mourns. Public and private houses were tastefully draped in mourning and at 12 o'clock noon, the church bells commenced to toll and minute guns were fired. A long procession was formed on the depot grounds, under the direction of the committee of arrangements headed by Col. George A. Merrill, and of the Marshall of the occasion, Col. W. G. Veazey, assisted by Capt. Dunton, and Messrs. B. K. Chase and Perley Downer."⁸

Seven companies of the ninth regiment of militia were present, under the command of Col. Levi G. Kingsley.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rutland Herald, various dates

⁷ Rutland Herald, April 20, 1865

⁸ Ibid.

The procession included the militia (first in line); then the committee of arrangements, clergy, U.S., State and County officers, judges of the court and members of the bar, members of the press, town and village officers (all second in line); Fire Department (third); and citizens (fourth).

“Headed by martial music, the bells meanwhile tolling and the guns firing, the procession moved through Merchants Row and Grove Street to Williams Street, up Williams to Cottage, down Cottage to West, up West to Main, down Main to Washington, down Washington to Court, and through Court to the Congregational Church, where the religious services were to be holden (sic).”⁹

The service was attended by an overflow crowd of dignitaries, officials and citizens of Rutland. Music was provided by Mr. Lucius Morse and the Rutland Mendelssohn Chorus Club.

The funeral oration was read by the Reverend Norman Seaver, who delivered “a discourse, which for deep thought, great earnestness and impressiveness, and high and fervid eloquence, is seldom equaled in any pulpit.”¹⁰ (The Herald was at its hyperbolic best.)

Thus, in the same week, accounts of two great events were received in Rutland. Responses were similar (identical in some ways) in their organization, participation and sequence. Only the moods differed, and this difference, from great joy and exultation to somber observance and grief could not possibly have been wider for any two other conceived events.

Rutland 1861 – 1885

Before the Civil War, a perfect storm of progress was brewing in Rutland.

- The marble industry, begun in the 1830s, had grown into a major employer and a bedrock of the town’s economy.
- The Rutland Railroad provided outlets for marble and marble finished products, and other goods produced.
- The Industrial Revolution and the arrival of new technologies were creating new opportunities for growth and employment.

Rutland 1861-1865

During this time, cities and towns across the nation were called upon to provide support to the war effort in any way possible. The challenges this brought to day-to-day life were twofold:

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

- Women, children and men who stayed behind were required to fill the roles left by the large numbers of men who went off to war.
- War-related tasks were added to the normal business of the town; they were overtime activities. An example was the work done by the U. S. Sanitary Commission; women working as a team gathered clothing, food and other necessities for the troops. This was in addition to managing the home and the farm or business. See RHS Quarterly, Vol. 41, No. 3 – “The Home Front”.

Rutland found additional ways to contribute through the physical resources and capacity of the town.

The Fairgrounds

On a number of occasions, the Rutland Fairgrounds were used for military purposes.

The grounds served as an encampment for the 1st Regiment, almost as soon as the war began. It had been intended that the regiment be mustered in at Brattleboro, but circumstances dictated that Rutland be used instead, and the men were housed in tents for the six days they were there.¹¹

Later, in February of 1862, the 7th Infantry was encamped and mustered in at the Fairgrounds. By this time, and with enough time to prepare, the buildings and grounds had been improved enough to house the men adequately and comfortably for the length of their 5-week stay during the heart of winter.¹²

The Fairgrounds was also one of the state-wide sites used for qualification for the United States Sharpshooters in the summer and fall of 1861. See RHS Quarterly Volume 42, No. 3 - “The Sharpshooters”.

The Rutland Railroad

During the war years, the town of Rutland was the railroad center of southwestern Vermont, with lines north to Burlington, south to Bennington, southeast to Bellows Falls, and west to Troy, N. Y.¹³

Connections with affiliates of the railroad and lines of other carriers provided a network of rail transportation all over the northeast. This was one of many examples of industrial and technological development

¹¹ Benedict, George Grenville, “Vermont in the Civil War”, volumes 1 and 2

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The Rutland Road, Jim Shaughnessy, Howell-North Books, 1964, P. 15, 21

arriving just in time to support the war. (Twenty five years earlier, there were few railroads.)

The Rutland Railroad at the time was having severe operational and financial problems, thanks to competition with the rival Vermont Central Railroad.

Nevertheless, the line “soldiered on”, and contributed by transporting troops and war-related material to their destinations.¹⁴

Room and Board

The combination of the railroad and the abundance of hotels and boarding houses made Rutland a convenient stopping-over place for civilian travel.

The earlier case of the party travelling with the body of John Brown and spending the night in Rutland has been documented.¹⁵ Similar hospitality was extended to officials, wives and other family, and businessmen who had war-related needs to travel to Washington or to the front.

Rutland 1865-1885

In the post-war period, Rutlanders divided their time and efforts between confronting the after-effects, and experiencing the growth and prosperity that had been promised by conditions in town before the war.

Caring for Veterans

Throughout the war, the nation was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the fighting and the resulting carnage.

After the war, the nation was similarly overwhelmed by the numbers of veterans who needed care of one type or another, and sometimes with more than one problem to confront.

Many were too sick or injured to tend to their own needs and make lives for themselves. Care for these men was left to family, as it always had been in earlier wars.

Some veterans struggled to cope with emotional or mental problems. Things we recognize today as post-combat disorders were diagnosed as mental illnesses. Many times these men wound up in jails, poorhouses or insane asylums.

*Civil War Pensions*¹⁶

The pension act passed on 14 July 1862 increased pension rates and provided potential eligibility for pensions to every person in military

¹⁴ The Rutland Road

¹⁵ RHS Quarterly Volume XXII No. 2, “The Home Front”

¹⁶ Nat’l. Archives, Prologue Magazine, Spr. 2010, “A Reasonable Degree of Promptitude”

or naval service since 4 March 1861, their widows and orphans, and dependent orphan sisters.¹⁷

However, applications quickly piled up because of roadblocks in the law and in its administration:¹⁸

- Applications for death or disability benefits required confirmation from the Adjutant General's Office or the Navy Department. This became a huge bottleneck.
- Minor variations in statutory language led to problems of interpretation.
- Biennial physical examinations were required for continuation of disability benefits.

*The Grand Army of the Republic and its Allied Orders*¹⁹

Early on it was recognized that family and social responses to veterans' needs would be inadequate. Further, with so many other problems to confront, there was little public mandate to improve societal approaches to the needs of veterans.

The lack of public support, the need for camaraderie, and the desire for the political influence necessary to improve their situation drew veterans together. As early as 1866, a veterans organization was formed – the Grand Army of the Republic. This organization grew in stature and became an advocate for Civil War veterans. This included the founding of soldiers' homes, providing relief to veterans in distress and lobbying for effective pension legislation.

After the war, and for the remainder of the century, The Grand Army of the Republic's greatest contribution toward veterans' well-being was its lobbying the U. S. Government on behalf of veterans. This type of advocacy, in the face of constant opposition to the pension program and charges of corruption, led to continued favorable legislation in support of veterans' pension benefits.

Two allied orders²⁰ were formed to support the G.A.R. The Sons of Union Veterans was formed in 1881 and was named as the official successor to the G.A.R. The Women's Relief Corps was formed in 1883 as the women's auxiliary of the G.A.R. In the ensuing years, other men's and women's organizations were awarded the title of "allied order".

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War website: www.suvvw.org

²⁰ An allied order is an officially recognized support group of the GAR.

Advancements in Medical Care

Also contributing to improved treatment of aging veterans was the arrival in the late nineteenth century of formal medical care facilities (hospitals, clinics), as well as new procedures and treatments for a variety of illnesses and injuries. These improvements were, to a degree, a product of the war. Where the war created the need for medical care and trauma response on a large scale in the first place, it advanced the development of methods and solutions to address the need. See, RHS Quarterly, Vol. 43, No. 3 "Civil War Medical Care".

*The Bennington Soldiers Home*²¹

In Vermont, a movement was initiated to establish a soldiers' home. Generally, this movement was met with approval, and a project was commissioned by the Vermont Legislature.

Rutlander Redfield Proctor was elected Chairman of the Bennington Soldiers Home Association. Land and buildings in Bennington were donated by wealthy businessman Seth B. Hunt.

The donation of the property was a fortuitous development for the Soldiers' Home, and it continues to operate today as the Vermont Veterans' Home.

Demographic, Social and Economic Changes

"Go West, young man" was the theme of Horace Greeley's famous 1865 editorial, espousing the virtues of Manifest Destiny, the view that the U. S. was destined to settle the land coast-to-coast. Many of the returning veterans realized that things had changed and there was little to return to; thus, Greeley's advice was often heeded. The uncertainties imposed by the issues surrounding slavery had been removed, and there was nothing to hold them back from joining the rush to the western territories.

Rutland was not spared from this flight but, because of its transportation advantages, its skilled work force, and its position in the marble industry, it was able to cope with the situation better than most.²²

Between 1870 and 1880, Rutland's population increased by almost 25%. This was in addition to growth that had been seen in previous decades.

²¹ Vermont in the Civil War website: www.vermontcivilwar.org

²² Rutland Historical Society, *Rutland in Retrospect* (Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1978)

Rutland Population²³

<u>1850</u>	3,713	<u>1870</u>	9,834
<u>1860</u>	7,577	<u>1880</u>	12,149

In 1880, Rutland was the most populous community in the state, eclipsing Burlington by a small amount.

New Employers and New Opportunities

Progress was not limited to the marble business, although many new companies were either makers of machinery and tools for the marble industry or creators of finished products made from marble.

In 1877 the Howe Scale Company opened a plant in Rutland after moving from Brandon to Rutland “to share in Rutland’s transportation advantages and its numerous and skilled industrial workforce”.²⁴

New employers such as Howe Scale utilized the diversity provided by the Rutland workforce, and also added to it.

The following are lists of the largest employers (industry or company)²⁵, and the most common professions²⁶ during that period in Rutland, including the area outside the corporation.

Employer

Profession

Major Employers

Marble business
Central Vermont R.R.
Howe Scale Co.
Newspaper Publishers
Rutland Found. & Mach.²⁷
Gay, Kimball & Co.

Most Common Professions

Farmer
Builder
Merchant
Teacher

Other Employers

Lincoln Iron Works
Schools
Retail outlets / agencies
D. Shortsleeve & Co.
Mansfield & Stimson

Other Professions

Dress maker
Painter and/or paper hanger
Lawyer
Physician or dentist
Livestock breeder

- The major employers in the marble business were: Vermont Marble Co., Columbian Marble Co., Ripley Sons, Sherman & Gleason, West Rutland Marble Co. (The Vermont Marble Co. had acquired the Rutland Marble Co. and the Sutherland Falls Marble Co.)

²³ “Geography, History and Civil Government of Vermont”, Conant and Stone

²⁴ Rutland in Retrospect

²⁵ “The History of Rutland County, Vermont”, Smith and Rann

²⁶ Gazetteer and Business Directory of Rutland County, VT. for 1881-1882, (Hamilton Child, Syracuse, N. Y.)

²⁷ Full Name is Rutland Foundry & Machine Shop & Charles F. Harris Manufacturing Co.

- Employers in the newspaper business were: Rutland Herald, Rutland Globe, Rutland Independent and Rutland Courier.
- The Rutland Railroad had been leased to the Central Vermont R.R. (formed from the Vermont Central R.R.).
- The profession “builder” includes general contractors, builders, masons, carpenters.
- The profession “teacher” includes those who taught in the existing schools, and also many who were specialty teachers of music, art, foreign languages, etc.
- The generic profession “laborer” is excluded.
- The profession “merchant” includes store owners and single proprietors of all types.

Merchants set up shop in downtown Rutland, which was now concentrated in the Merchants Row area. The many shops and stores included: bakeries, hardware stores, millinery shops, dry goods stores, insurance agencies, hotels, banks, civic buildings (courthouse and post office), photographer studio, cigar store, newspaper publishers, tailor, jeweler and watch maker, furniture store, fish market, meat market, druggist, boots and shoes store.

Community, Social and Recreational Development²⁸

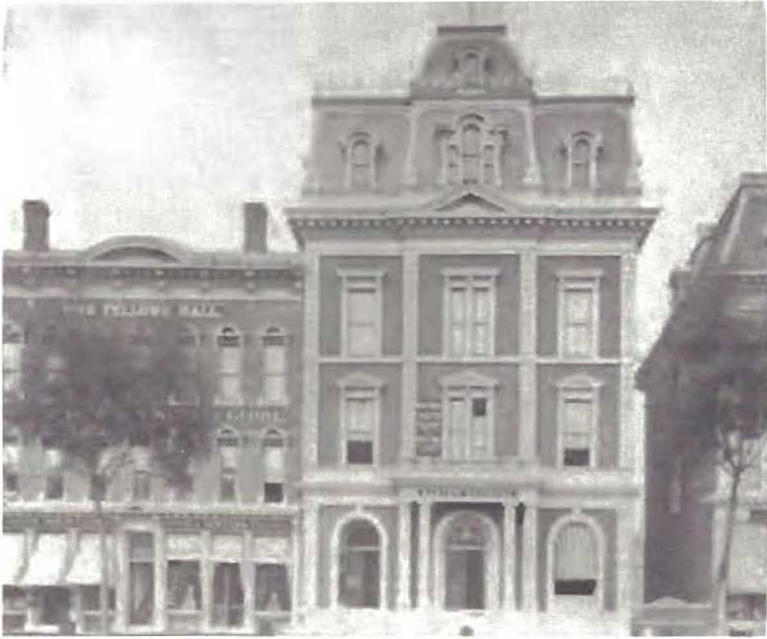
After the Civil War, Rutlanders increased the pace of commercial development, to house and market the goods required for the new semi-urban lifestyle, and to provide outlets for people to enjoy the prosperous lives they had built.

In addition to ongoing commercial development, construction of personal residences flourished. The affluence of individual citizens was responsible for the significant increase in lavishly appointed homes in the town. Many of these buildings stand today; together they give Rutland a collection of Victorian-style homes to rival those of any small city or town in the Northeast.

Social and recreational aspects of life were not ignored. From Rutland in Retrospect: “Social clubs and civic organizations began to appear in the late nineteenth century. A bicycle club was active in the 1880s, as the bicycling craze hit the United States. The club built and operated a large roller skating rink during the same decade.....Culture and entertainment were given a forum by the construction of the Ripley Music Hall in 1868. Although the Music Hall burned in 1875, the Ripley Op-

²⁸ Rutland in Retrospect

era House was built on the same site in 1881. The Rutland Free Library Association found quarters on the lower floor of the Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Hall..... The Baxter Memorial Library provided a second literary oasis.”



RUTLAND IN RETROSPECT



RUTLAND IN RETROSPECT

*Above: The Baxter Bank Building, built in the early 1870s.
Below: The United States Courthouse and Post Office, built in 1858.
These two buildings were landmarks in the downtown district, and in the Center Street area, respectively. They still are today.*

Rutland's Beautiful 19th Century Homes

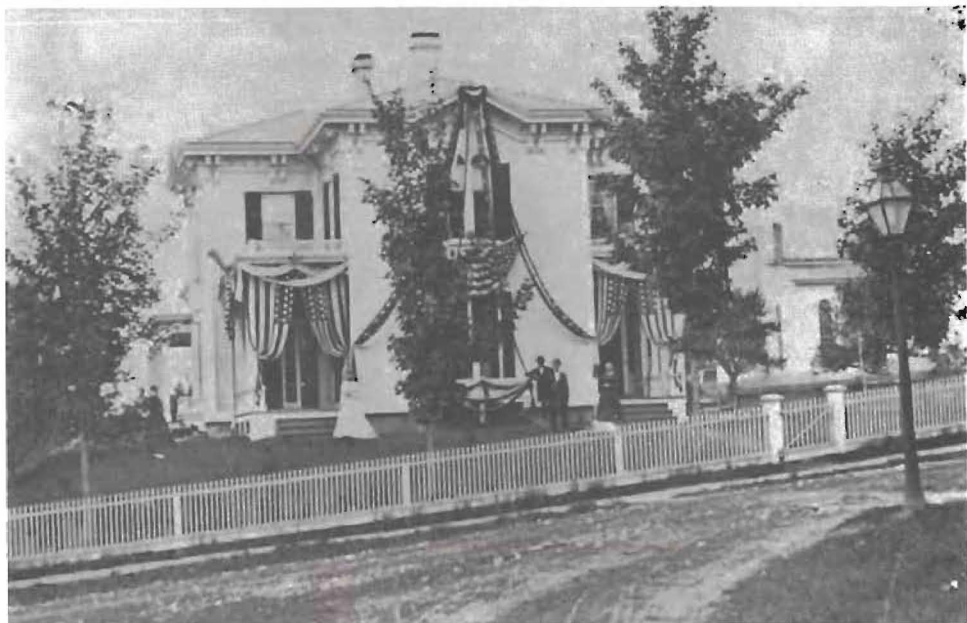
RUTLAND IN RETROSPECT



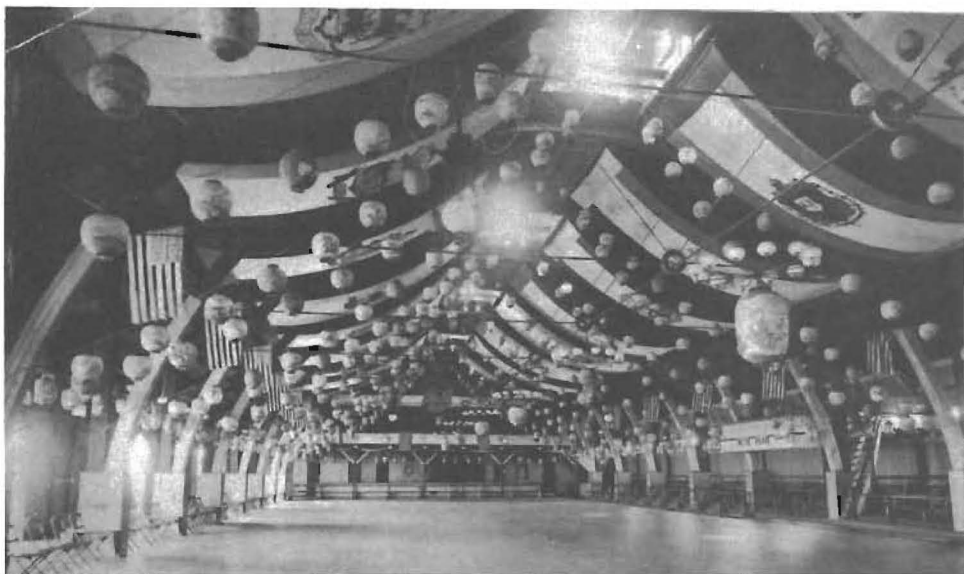
RUTLAND IN RETROSPECT



*Above: The Kingsley House on Pine Street (still standing)
Below: The Page House on South Main Street (still standing)*



*Above: The Evarts House on West Street (still standing)
Below: The Chase House (gone), on Gallows Hill, Crescent and Church Streets, was prominent in period panoramas.*

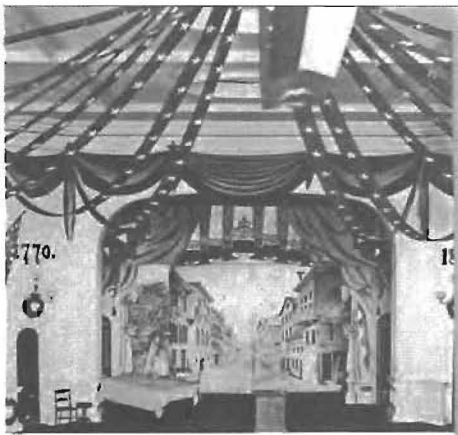


The trend toward leisure sports and activities continued into the last years of the 19th century, with the advent of organized clubs and sports teams, and events of all types at the Rutland Fair Grounds.

Rutlanders also found time to celebrate their own history. In 1870, the centennial celebration was held. It was a four-day event in downtown Rutland organized by a group of prominent citizens led by W. Y. Ripley. The Ripley Music Hall was the site of several of the items on the program.



RUTLAND IN RETROSPECT



RUTLAND IN RETROSPECT

The 1870 Centennial

Left: Merchants Row was the focal point of the event.

Right: The Ripley Music Hall, site of speeches and other gatherings.

The War Did Not End For Some Rutlanders

Occasionally, the war created post-war issues other than the typical ones (e.g. a veteran trying to collect a pension, or trying to shake the effects of an injury or a disease).

These issues may have involved behind-the-scenes wrangling to right a wrong, or even the opportunity to carry skills learned over to other campaigns.

Rutlanders were involved in a few of these more unusual cases.

Captain Edmund Morse

The life of prominent Rutlander Captain Edmund A. Morse was filled with accomplishments before, during and after the Civil War.

Captain Morse was identified in an earlier RHS Quarterly issue as the benefactor of the Royce family from Rutland and Franklin, Tennessee.²⁹

He also gained recognition when he brought George Hart, an ex-slave, to Rutland sometime during the latter part of 1862. Mr. Hart later enlisted, at Rutland, into the service and joined the famous Massachusetts 54th Regiment.³⁰

Captain Morse's service record was exemplary, but was marred by incidents involving the senior commanders and fellow officers of his respective units.

Captain Morse in the Army of the Gulf

In April of 1862, the 7th Vermont Regiment was unloading at their camp quarters at Ship Island, Louisiana. Quartermaster Lt. Morse's orders from commanding officer General Benjamin Butler were to disembark the troops, which Lt. Morse interpreted as "troops and gear", which apparently was not the intent of Gen. Butler. Lt. Morse saw that a stay of even a short time on an unprotected spit of land would require at least some supplies, an interpretation which was justified when a fierce 2-day storm ripped through the area.³¹

Gen. Butler must have seen this interpretation of his orders as some sort of disobedience, because he had Lt. Morse placed under arrest, held in custody for a few days, and then released.³²

In July of 1862, while in camp at Baton Rouge, Quartermaster Morse and Captain Dutton led an expedition to procure much-needed food,

²⁹ RHS Quarterly Volume 41 No. 2 article entitled "Review of a Genteel Spy".

³⁰ RHS Quarterly Volume XXII No. 2, "Their Share of the Glory"

³¹ Holbrook, William C., "7th Regiment of Vermont Volunteers – From 1862 to 1866" (New York, N. Y.: American Bank Note Company, 1882), pages 4-5

³² Ibid.

mainly for the sick men of the regiment. To do this, they confiscated wagons and teams belonging to rebel civilians. Gen. Thomas Williams, a subordinate to Gen. Butler, had Morse and Dutton arrested for confiscation of property.³³

General Williams must have been unaware of the needs of his men as well as the day-to-day practices then in effect in both armies.

In a similar fashion to the first incident, Quartermaster Morse was released in short order.

On 1 November 1862, mere months after these incidents, Quartermaster Morse was promoted to Captain. He was appointed Assistant Quartermaster of the United States Volunteers, attached to the Department of the Gulf.

In December 1862, Gen. Nathaniel Banks became the commanding officer, Department of the Gulf, relieving Gen. Butler.³⁴

Capt. Morse was thus spared further involvement with Gen. Butler.

Captain Morse in the Quartermasters Corps

As Assistant Quartermaster, Capt. Morse suffered additional unjust charges, this time at the hands of unscrupulous businessmen and a fellow officer in the Quartermasters Corps.

Capt. Morse was accused of being a principal in a transaction involving Capt. R. B. Locke, Assistant Quartermaster, and several private citizens. This transaction involved the transporting of coal to the vessel Gilliam, a Rebel blockade runner which was seized by the Union Army. In a series of affidavits, Capt. Locke attempted to prove the involvement of Capt. Morse. These affidavits included details about price negotiations, accounting issues, and the assertion that Capt. Morse had “handled” the money. Those matters had been discussed at a meeting among all the participants, but the meeting had been staged in order to establish the “involvement” of Capt. Morse.

In a sworn statement, backed up by notarized documents and affidavits, Capt. Morse provided all details of the transaction (from his perspective) and the meeting at which the transaction was discussed, refuting the inferences of his accusers. His defense was simply a presentation of facts that proved that he had shipped the coal to Capt. Locke in the normal course of business between officers of the Quartermaster Corps. What Locke did with the coal was up to Locke to explain. Capt. Locke’s instructions were to deliver the coal “to bearer” of the order, and

³³ Benedict, page 19

³⁴ Rutland Historical Society, The Edmund A. Morse Collection

which conferred no further obligations on Capt. Morse to ascertain the ultimate destination of the coal.

By the time of Capt. Morse's statement, Capt. Locke had already been dishonorably discharged from the service for misconduct.

The senior command in the Quartermasters Corps believed Capt. Morse. Documents in the Morse Collection of the Rutland Historical Society include endorsements by senior officers as well as the Advocate General exonerating Capt. Morse of all charges.³⁵

The formal charges and the exoneration of Capt. Morse all took place within a 3-week period in January-February, 1865.

However, Captain Morse's difficulties were not over. After the war, there were problems in settling accounts, mainly because Capt. Morse had paid for some provisions for black teamsters who had worked, without pay, in the lead up to the assault on Port Hudson. This was not an approved expense, and it caused "great difficulty after the war in settling my account". Personal papers show that the final settlement of accounts did not take place until 1867.

Captain Morse was able to survive all these difficulties, and returned to continue his life as one of the Rutland's prominent citizens. He was the partner and brother-in-law of Dr. E. A. Pond, the noted physician. Together, they owned and operated Pond and Morse (drugs and general merchandise), which was housed in the Morse Block in downtown Rutland.



RUTLAND IN RETROSPECT

The Morse Block, corner Merchants Row and Center St.

³⁵ The Morse Collection.



Edmund A. Morse

Benjamin Butler – “The Beast of New Orleans”³⁶

Even the staunchest opponents of Benjamin Butler (and there were many) had to concede that he was a skillful politician and lawyer. He utilized these skills to advance himself to high positions in the Union Army, where he proved to be an effective if controversial administrator, but an inept military commander.

Characterizations of his command style include: cruel, prejudiced, willing to hurt anyone who got in his way, misused his positions, laid blame for setbacks on his subordinates.³⁷

At the start of the war, Gen. Butler used his political influence to gain appointment as Brigadier in charge of all Massachusetts regiments.

In late 1861, some serendipitous success, gained him a promotion by President Lincoln to Brevet Major General, and he was given command of the newly-formed Army of the Gulf.

Riding the coattails of Adm. David Farragut’s success during the capture of New Orleans, Gen. Butler was made the military leader of the city. During his tenure, his crude and boorish behavior toward the city residents, especially the women, caused Jefferson Davis to declare him an outlaw, and order that he be hanged on the spot if captured.

A number of failures ensued.

³⁶ Civil War Times, May-June, 1993, “The Beast of New Orleans”, Gerard Patterson

³⁷ Ibid.

- His quarantine of foreign ships and the confiscation of large amounts of cargo belonging to foreign governments caused him to be relieved of military responsibility for a period of about a year.
- In 1864, he was again given command, this time of the Army of the James. His tactical defeat at the Bermuda Hundred peninsula by a greatly outnumbered Confederate force led to his being diminished in his command ("superceded"), and eventually given a much smaller command at Fortress Monroe, within the Department of Virginia and North Carolina .
- At Fortress Monroe, he devised a plan to take Fort Fisher at Wilmington, North Carolina. The plan consisted of ramming an explosives-laden steamer into the fort itself. The plan failed miserably, and only the steamer (Union Army property) detonated.

Gen. Grant had seen enough. Gen. Butler was removed from command and sent back to Massachusetts. His military career was over.

The (Continued) Ordeal of the Seventh

The ranks of the 7th Vermont Infantry included over 170 Rutlanders, by far the greatest number of Rutlanders of any Vermont regiment.

The 7th had a tough time of it from the day they set foot on Louisiana soil on 7 April 1862. The calamitous effect the southern climate had on the unit was discussed in a previous quarterly issue.³⁸

On the battlefield they fared no better, meeting with confusing circumstances and orders, and then being censured for reasons which proved to be unsubstantiated.

The Battle of Baton Rouge

At Baton Rouge, the regiment was part of the unit commanded by the aforementioned General Thomas Williams.

The Battle of Baton Rouge was fought on 5 August 1862 in the early dawn hours. A heavy fog engulfed the battlefield, which included part of the city itself. Making matters worse for Union troops, no specific orders were given, and no defenses were prepared.³⁹ During the battle, there was much shifting and moving among the Union forces, resulting in a number of incidents of friendly fire. There were cases, on both sides, of units giving up their positions in "a disorderly manner".⁴⁰

³⁸ RHS Quarterly Volume 44, No. 3, "POWs and Casualties"

³⁹ Holbrook, pages 41-42

⁴⁰ Holbrook, pages 74-75 and 107-108; Benedict page 38

The battle lasted several hours, and was ultimately decided when the Confederate ram Arkansas had an engine failure, and could not execute its part of the battle plan, resulting in the Confederates retiring. The Union held the city and claimed the victory.

The 7th Vermont at the Battle

The 7th had been decimated by illness, mainly due to conditions during the abortive attempt to capture Vicksburg in the spring of 1862. The unit was able to field only 311 men out of the almost 800 who were available five weeks before.⁴¹

The 7th was positioned in the second row of the line of battle, directly in the rear of the 21st Indiana Regiment, with the 14th Maine diagonally to the front left, and other units diagonally to the front right.

In a stroke of terrible misfortune, both Gen. Williams and their commanding officer Col. George T. Roberts were killed at critical junctures during the battle. In addition to putting the regiment in the worst of all possible circumstances regarding leadership and direction, this misfortune removed the only officers who could have fully and accurately attested to the events which were to come.

General Butler's Subsequent Orders

After the battle, Gen. Butler issued an order effusively praising all units which had participated, stressing the cohesiveness the units had shown, and the support they had provided to one another.⁴²

A few weeks later, Gen. Butler made a number of charges against the 7th in a formal order. The charges are summarized as follows:⁴³

The unit:

- Broke and ran when not pressured by the enemy
- Refused to come to the aid of the 21st Indiana Regiment
- Fired into the 21st Indiana
- Surrendered the regimental colors at the time of the retreat

The penalties that were levied were the removal of the regimental colors from the unit, and the denial of permission to include "Baton Rouge" on the list of engagements inscribed on the colors.

Reaction to the Charges

Gen. Butler's charges brought a stream of protests from the officers and men of the 7th, as well as from citizens and officials in Vermont.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Holbrook, page 37

⁴² Holbrook, pages 51-52

⁴³ Holbrook, pages 64-65

⁴⁴ Holbrook, pages 66-73

Lt. Col. William Holbrook (now commanding officer of the regiment) made a formal request to Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas, that a court of inquiry be convened to review the charges. This request was endorsed by Gen. John Phelps, their former brigade commander.

The Governor of Vermont, Frederick Holbrook (father of William), and the Vermont Legislature made formal requests for the involvement of the high command in Washington, D.C. The requests were made to the very highest levels of the political and military organizations, including President Lincoln, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and Chief of the Army Henry Halleck.

On October 3rd, Gen. Halleck ordered Gen. Butler to proceed with the inquiry in New Orleans, as there was nobody available in Washington to handle the matter.

Upon receipt of that order, Gen. Butler formed the court of inquiry from his own officers.

Throughout this process, Gen. Butler maintained that he only reported facts as stated in written reports. He claimed further that he was supportive of the request for an inquiry.

The Trial and the Judgment

Historians G.G. Benedict and William Holbrook delved deep into the testimony to get the full story. It was learned that there were many extenuating facts, including the condition of the regiment, considerable confusion all around, skimpy orders and no defensive preparations, and similar behavior by other units.

One hundred fifty years later, only the official results of the inquiry are considered. The following are direct quotes from the report of the board of inquiry, regarding the specific charges that had been levied.⁴⁵

- Broke and ran when not pressured by the enemy
“Shortly after his (Roberts) fall, the regiment fled about 100 feet to the rear and to the cover of some gullies in a disorderly manner”
- Refused to come to the aid of the 21st Indiana Regiment
“So far as any evidence appears it would seem that the line officers behaved well during the day.”
“It does not appear that any orders were communicated to the Vermont regiment during the day which they disobeyed.”
- Fired into the 21st Indiana
“It appears that the Seventh Vermont regiment, or a part of it, did fire into the Twenty-first Indiana, but there is an exculpation to

⁴⁵ Holbrook, pages 96-98

be found in the testimony of the commanding officer of the Indiana regiment Captain Grimsley, to wit: Occupying the position they did the Seventh had no means of knowing where we were..... My impression is that when we received the volleys from the Seventh Vermont we ran under a fire which was already going on.”

- Lost regimental colors at the time of the retreat
“It appears that the camp colors alleged by Captain Manning, of the Fourth Massachusetts battery, to have been brought from the camp of the Seventh Vermont by John Donoghue, were two markers of the form in common use, and one small United States flag, which had been used for no military purpose for a long time previously.”

Reviewing the charges and the findings⁴⁶

Regarding the first charge above, it can certainly be argued that the death of the commanding officer constituted “pressure from the enemy”.

Although it appeared that all charges were either refuted or explained, Gen. Butler backed off only one of the charges, that of the regimental colors being left; he thus returned the colors to the unit.

The charge involving the colors was both ludicrous and galling for a number of reasons:

- The regimental colors were not even on the field that day, as the regiment was the color company, and bore the national colors (the American flag).
- According to witnesses both inside and outside the regiment, the national colors were borne with great honor by Sgt. Sherman W. Parkhurst all throughout the engagement.⁴⁷
- Military men at the time uniformly understood the difference between “camp colors” used to mark camp boundaries, and “regimental colors”. It was inconceivable to them that a senior commanding officer could have confused one for the other.

(Both Benedict and Holbrook concluded that this particular charge on the part of Gen. Butler was a fabrication.)

Further actions by supporters of the 7th

Although the accounts of this incident, by both Holbrook and Benedict, end with the findings of the Board, it is obvious that further pressures to secure the complete exoneration of the regiment were applied.

⁴⁶ Holbrook, pages 75-76

⁴⁷ Holbrook, page 79

(After all, the requests made by the Vermont politicians for the formal involvement of the War Department had not been responded to.)

As a result, an order dated 10 July 1866 was issued by Gen. Philip Sheridan, the famed cavalry officer and now commanding officer of the Military Division of the South, authorizing the inscription of “Baton Rouge” to the regimental colors.

Exoneration

Thus, all charges made and sanctions imposed by Gen. Butler against the 7th Vermont were ultimately refuted, reversed or dismissed.

This must have been redemption with a bitter taste to all the surviving members of the regiment, who suffered throughout the war (the 7th served longer than any other Vermont regiment), and had to bear the additional burden of being falsely accused of misconduct while in the command of Gen. Benjamin Butler.

Details of this episode are in the Holbrook and Benedict works. (See Sources.)

Vermont, Rutland and the Fenians

In many ways the war was just the beginning for the Fenians, a secular revolutionary group dedicated to the creation of a liberated Ireland, and which had multiple ties to Rutland and Vermont.

John Sinnott and John Lonergan

John Sinnott was the young man from West Rutland who was a 1st Lieutenant, and second in command, of Company A of the 13th Vermont Regiment, and was killed at Gettysburg. Lieut. Sinnott was memorialized by having the West Rutland post of the G.A.R. named in his honor. The Memorial Hall window, currently on display on the main floor of the RHS Center Street building, bears the name of “John T. Sennott” (spelling was either Sinnott or Sennott).

Company A was a special unit. It was named the Emmett Guards and was the only ethnic unit recruited in Vermont. Many of the men who enlisted in this company were Irish immigrants from the quarries of West Rutland and Proctor.⁴⁸

Captain John Lonergan of Burlington was a close friend of Lieut. Sinnott, and had organized the Emmett Guards by recruiting Irishmen from the western side of Vermont, especially in the Rutland and Burlington areas.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Vermont’s Irish Rebel, William L. McKone, Brewster River Press

⁴⁹ Ibid.

When the Civil War ended, the men of the 13th returned to civilian lives. A detail of what each did is not available, but many appeared to have joined the Fenians in addition to their civilian employment.

Who were the Fenians?⁵⁰

The Fenians had been formed before the Civil War and were dedicated to waging a military campaign against the British Empire. In North America, their intent was to formulate and execute a plan to capture Canada, and hold it for ransom for the freedom of Ireland. The organization remained intact during the war but took no military action. (Meetings were held periodically in Rutland and other Vermont towns.)

Fuel was added to the fire when a small group of Confederates attacked the Vermont town of St. Albans, doing some damage and then escaping to Canada, where they were allowed to remain free. It was widely interpreted in America that England, via the actions of the Canadians, was showing favoritism toward the South, even though England had professed neutrality.

The Fenian "Wars"⁵¹

At the end of the Civil War, with troops returning to their homes, the Fenians formed up and made a few incursions into Canada. They were hoping that the hostility America felt toward England and Canada, based largely on the St. Albans raid, would make America sympathetic to their cause.

In 1866, three separate attempts at an invasion were made, the final one being launched from St. Albans. These were small in scale but serious in nature, as people on both sides were killed. The hoped-for support from America did not materialize, as for the most part the Fenians were regarded as international criminals.

Between 1866 and 1870, the Fenians took no hostile actions, as opposition from several sources and internal conflicts hampered them.

In 1870, a group of fewer than 500 men crossed the border into Canada multiple times, and did battle with Canadian troops. A few Fenians were killed but the well-positioned Canadians suffered no casualties. This time, with so few men, the Fenians were not prepared for much of a fight, and retreated back over the border.

The raids in 1866 and 1870 were failures. However, some historians have claimed that the guerrilla-type actions of the Fenians both in Eu-

⁵⁰ "What Happened to the Fenians After 1866?" Alan Gevinson, TeachingHistory.org

⁵¹ Ibid.

rope and America helped to keep the dream alive, eventually resulting in the independence of Ireland in the early 20th century.

Conclusion

Now, in July of 2015, the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War has ended, at least as far as the calendar is concerned.

Volunteers and members of the RHS who have participated in this project for the full four years cannot help but to have gained a keen appreciation for the significance of this milestone event in the history of our country and our community.

Project participants have also gained an appreciation for what can happen when human discourse fails to resolve serious differences, and armed conflict ensues.

At the beginning of the war, the Union thought it would be easy pickings, so much so that it enlisted men only for 90 days. The idea was that one good battle would do the trick. How wrong they were.

The Confederates were losing the legislative battle in Congress. The writing was on the wall that slavery would eventually be disallowed or severely impaired in the new territories. The only way to preserve and extend their way of life was via armed conflict. Little did they know how damaging the war would be to their people, land and property.

It is a sobering realization that sometimes intractable problems must be brought to the battlefield, regardless of the carnage and loss.

When things come to that point, societies get through it and wish, hope and pray that it won't happen again. Ultimately, that was the common ground that everyone could agree on.

The Rutland Historical Society has completed its 4-year project to commemorate the Civil War. Work is proceeding to provide results and end-products of this project on our website, for future retrieval.

Over time, the RHS will continue to present relevant articles, and to expand online information sources for Civil War related topics.

Sources

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The Bennington Soldiers Home, Bennington, Vt.



VERMONT FOR YOUNG VERMONTERS, IRENE KIMBALL



VH VERMONT.GOV

*Above: The Bennington Soldiers Home (pictured in 1908) was established in 1887 by a task force led by Rutlander Redfield Proctor.
Below: The Vermont Veterans Home (today), the former Bennington Soldiers' Home*